



**The American
Radio Relay
League**



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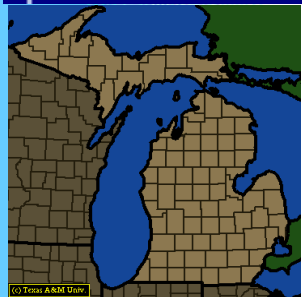
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Amateur Radio Emergency Service

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Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES)

From The ARRL Public Service Communications Manual S1C1

The Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) consists of licensed amateurs who have [voluntarily registered](#) their qualifications and equipment for communications duty in the public service when disaster strikes. Every licensed amateur, regardless of membership in ARRL or any other local or national organization, is eligible for membership in the ARES. The only qualification, other than possession of an Amateur Radio license, is a sincere desire to serve. Because ARES is an amateur service, only amateurs are eligible for membership. The possession of emergency-powered equipment is desirable, but is not a requirement for membership.

1.1 ARES Organization

There are four levels of ARES organization--national, section, district and local. National emergency coordination at ARRL Headquarters is under the supervision of the ARRL Field Services Manager, who is responsible for advising all ARES officials regarding their problems, maintaining contact with federal government and other national officials concerned with amateur emergency communications potential, and in general with carrying out the League's policies regarding emergency communications.

1.2 Section Level

At the section level, the Section Emergency Coordinator is appointed by the Section Manager (who is elected by the ARRL members in his or her section) and works under his/her supervision. In most sections, the SM delegates to the SEC the administration of the section emergency plan and the authority to appoint District and local ECs. Some of the ARRL sections with capable SECs are well-organized. A few have scarcely any organization at all. It depends almost entirely on who the section members have put into office as SM and whom he/she has appointed as SEC.

1.3 Local Level

It is at the local level where most of the real emergency organizing gets accomplished, because this is the level at which most emergencies occur and the level at which ARES leaders make direct contact with the ARES member-volunteers and with officials of the agencies to be served. The local EC is therefore the key contact in the ARES. The EC is appointed by the SEC, usually on the recommendation of the DEC. Depending on how the SEC has set up the section for administrative purposes, the EC may have jurisdiction over a small community or a large city, an entire county or even a group of counties. Whatever jurisdiction is assigned, the EC is in charge of all ARES activities in his area, not just one interest group, one agency, one club or one band.

1.4 District Level

In the large sections, the local groups could proliferate to the point where simply keeping track of them would be more than a full-time chore, not to mention the idea of trying to coordinate them in an actual emergency. To this end, SECs have the option of grouping their EC jurisdictions into logical units or "districts" and appointing a District EC to coordinate the activities of the local ECs in the district. In some cases, the districts may conform to the boundaries of governmental planning or emergency-operations districts, while in others they are simply based on repeater coverage or geographical boundaries.

1.5 Assistant ECs

Special-interest groups are headed up by Assistant Emergency Coordinators, designated by the EC to supervise activities of groups operating in certain bands, especially those groups which play an important role at the local level, but they may be designated in any manner the EC deems appropriate.

1.6 Planning Committee

These assistants, with the EC as chairman, constitute the local ARES planning committee and they meet together from time to time to discuss problems and plan projects to keep the ARES group active and well-trained.

There are any number of different situations and circumstances that might confront an EC, and his/her ARES unit should be organized in anticipation of them. An EC for a small town might find that the licensed amateur group is so small that appointing assistants is unnecessary or undesirable. On the other hand, an EC for a large city may find that even his assistants need assistants and that sometimes it is necessary to set up a special sub-organization to handle it. There is no specific point at which organization ceases and operation commences. Both phases must be concurrent because a living organization is a changing one, and the operations of a changing organization must change with the organization.

1.7 Operation and Flexibility

We have discussed how a typical ARES unit may be organized. Just what shape the plan in your locality will take depends on what your EC has to work with. He/she uses what he/she has, and leaves provision in the plan for what he/she hopes, wants and is trying to get. Flexibility is the keynote. The personnel, equipment and facilities available today may not be available tomorrow; conversely, what is lacking today may be available tomorrow. In any case, bear in mind that organizing and planning are not a one-person task. The EC is simply the leader, or, as the title indicates, the coordinator. His/her effectiveness inevitably will depend on what kind of a group he/she has to work with; that is, on you and your cohorts. Make yourself available to your EC as a member of his planning committee, or in any capacity for which you think you are qualified.

Local ARES operation will usually take the form of nets--HF nets, VHF (repeater) nets, even RTTY, packet or other special-mode nets, depending on need and resources available. Your EC should know where your particular interests lie, so that you can be worked in where your special talents will do the most good.

It is not always possible to use the services of all ARES members. While it is general policy that no ARES member must belong to any particular club or organization to participate in the program, local practical considerations may be such that you cannot be used. This is a matter that has to be decided by your EC. In some cases, even personality conflicts can cause difficulties; for example, the EC may decide that he cannot work with a particular person, and that the local ARES would be better served by excluding that person. This is a judgment that the EC would have to make; while personality conflicts should be avoided, they do arise, more often than we would prefer. The EC on the job must take the responsibility for making such subjective evaluations, just as the SEC and DEC must evaluate the effectiveness of the job being done by the EC.

1.8 ARES Operation During Emergencies and Disasters

Operation in an emergency net is little different from operation in any other net, requires preparation and training. This includes training in handling of written messages--that is, what is generally known as "traffic handling." Handling traffic is covered in detail in the ARRL *Operating Manual*. This is required reading for all ARES members--in fact, for all amateurs aspiring to participate in disaster communications.

The specifications of an effective communication service depend on the nature of the information which must be communicated. Pre-disaster plans and arrangements for disaster communications include:

- Identification of clients who will need Amateur Radio communication services.
- Discussion with these clients to learn the nature of the information which they will need to communicate, and the people they will need to communicate with.
- Specification, development and testing of pertinent services.

While much amateur-to-amateur communicating in an emergency is of a procedural or tactical nature, the real meat of communicating is formal written traffic for the record. Formal written traffic is important for:

- A record of what has happened--frequent status review, critique and evaluation. Completeness which minimizes omission of vital information.
- Conciseness, which when used correctly actually takes less time than passing informal traffic.
- Easier copy--receiving operators know the sequence of the information, resulting in fewer errors and repeats.

When relays are likely to be involved, standard ARRL message format should be used. The record should show, wherever possible:

1. A message number for reference purposes.
2. A precedence indicating the importance of the message.
3. A station of origin so any reply or handling inquiries can be referred to that station.
4. A check (count of the number of words in the message text) so receiving stations will know whether any words were missed.
5. A place of origin, so the recipient will know where the message came from (not necessarily the location of the station of origin).
6. Filing time, ordinarily optional but of great importance in an emergency message.

7. Date of origin.

The address should be complete and include a telephone number if known. The text should be short and to the point, and the signature should contain not only the name of the person sending the message but his title or connection also, if any.

Point-to-point services for direct delivery of emergency and priority traffic do not involve relays. Indeed, the full ARRL format is often not needed to record written traffic. Shortened forms should be used to save time and effort. For example, the call sign of the originating station usually identifies the place of origin. Also, the addressee is usually known and close by at the receiving station, so full address and telephone number are often superfluous. In many cases, message blanks can be designed so that only key words, letters or numbers have to be filled in and communicated. In some cases, the message form also serves as a log of the operation. Not a net goes by that you don't hear an ARL Fifty or an ARL Sixty One. Unfortunately, "greetings by Amateur Radio" does not apply well during disaster situations. You may hear an ARL text being used for health and welfare traffic, but rarely during or after the actual disaster. Currently, no ARL text describes the wind speed and barometric pressure of a hurricane, medical terminology in a mass casualty incident or potassium iodide in a nuclear power plant drill. While no one is suggesting that an ARL text be developed for each and every situation, there is no reason why amateurs can't work with the local emergency management organizations and assist them with more efficient communications.

Amateurs are often trained and skilled communicators. The emergency management community recognizes these two key words when talking about the Amateur Radio Service. Amateurs must use their skills to help the agencies provide the information that needs to be passed, while at the same time showing their talents as trained communicators who know how to pass information quickly and efficiently. We are expected to pass the information accurately, even if we do not understand the terminology.

Traffic handlers and ARES members are resourceful individuals. Some have developed other forms or charts for passing information. Some hams involved with the SKYWARN program, for instance, go down a list and fill in the blanks, while others use grid squares to define a region. Regardless of the agency that we are working with, we must use our traffic-handling skills to the utmost advantage. Sure, ARL messages are beneficial when we are passing health and welfare traffic. But are they ready to be implemented in times of need in your community? The traffic handler, working through the local ARES organizations, must develop a working relationship with those organizations who handle health and welfare inquiries. Prior planning and personal contact are the keys to allowing an existing National Traffic System to be put to its best use. If we don't interface with the agencies we serve, the resources of the Amateur Radio Service will go untapped.

Regardless of the format used, the appropriate procedures cannot be picked up solely by reading or studying. There is no substitute for actual practice. Your emergency net should practice regularly--much more often than it operates in a real or simulated emergency. Avoid complacency, the feeling that you will know how to operate when the time comes. You won't, unless you do it frequently, with other operators whose style of operating you get to know.

State Emergency Coordinator

Jim Wades, WB8SIW

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(734) 482-3230

[Email to Jim](#)

Who to contact

If you would like to join the ARES/RACES group in your county please contact your local Emergency Coordinator

If your county doesn't have a local coordinator please contact your District Emergency Coordinator

If you don't have a District or Local coordinator please contact your Section Emergency Coordinator Jim Wades, WB8SIW 1708 Dover Ct. Ypsilanti, MI 48198 (734) 482-3230 or email him at wb8siw@arrl.net

Updated 5 February 2003
by Bill LeVeque, WB8Q
Email: bleveque@up.net



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Amateur Radio Public Service Corps

ARRL GREAT LAKES DIVISION MICHIGAN SECTION

*Special Thanks To The
Emergency Management Division
Of The Michigan State Police
For Providing A Home For This Web Site!*



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Welcome To The Michigan Section ARPSC!

Want to have some serious fun? Try something different? Make new friends? All while giving something back to Amateur Radio and going above the call in supporting *your* League? Join the **ARRL Field Organization**, the family of official League volunteers with traditions stemming back to the earliest days of Amateur Radio. The League is volunteer-based, and the Field Organization serves as its backbone.

How Does It Work?

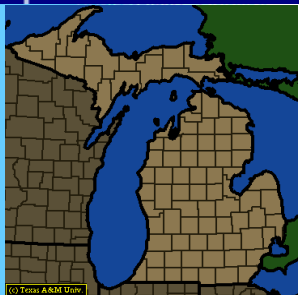
The country is divided into administrative **sections**, 70 in all. Most sections are whole states, but a few of the larger states are divided into two, or even more, as is the case with Texas and California. If you're a contester, these sections will be familiar to you.

The membership in each section elects a **Section Manager** (SM) once every two years. He or she is responsible for managing the Field Organization programs in the section. The SM is not involved in League policy-making (although he or she may have a strong voice in such matters)-- this is a function reserved for the **Division Director**. The SM's main job is to recruit, through several subordinate program managers or coordinators, League volunteers to staff eight crucial program areas: emergency communications, message traffic, volunteer monitoring, RFI problem-solving, support of affiliated clubs, government liaison, encouragement of technical activities, and dissemination of on-the-air bulletins.

Here's where you come in!

Sign up for an official ARRL appointment! There's a place for everybody: New ham or veteran, young or old, Novice or Extra, athlete, couch potato, or tech weenie. Contact the [Michigan Section Manager](#) advising the position you would like to be considered for:

- **Official Emergency Station**
- **Official Relay Station**



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- **Technical Specialist**
- **Public Information Officer**
- **Local Government Liaison**
- **Official Observer**
- **Official Bulletin Station**

"Promotions"

Although the buck stops with the Section Manager, the station-level appointees and program functions listed above are normally managed by a "cabinet" appointee called a *Section official*, under delegated authority of the SM. For example, the **Section Traffic Manager** (STM) manages the [National Traffic System](#) activity in the section, and appoints **Net Managers** (NM) and **Official Relay Stations**. Similarly, the [Section Emergency Coordinator](#) (SEC) implements the section's [ARES](#) plan and appoints **District ECs**, **ECs** and **Official Emergency Stations**. There's also an **Official Observer Coordinator**, **Technical Coordinator**, **Affiliated Club Coordinator**, **Bulletin Manager**, **Public Information Coordinator** and **State Government Liaison**. After you've gained experience as a station-level appointee, perhaps you'll find yourself in one of these leadership roles. For more information, contact the your local [Emergency Coordinator](#).

Updated 5 February 2003
By Bill LeVeque, WB8Q
Email: bleveque@up.net



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The Latest News From The SEC

Thank you for taking the time to read about RACES and ARES. Wondering what to do now? How do I sign up for RACES and ARES. What positions need filling? Here in Michigan we promote dual membership in both ARES and RACES. Let me show you just how easy it is to get involved.

ARES: How Do I Sign UP?

Let's start with the ARES portion. To sign up and become a member of ARES look on the EC page of this site. You will find the county listed where you live. Contact that EC and let him know you want to sign up for ARES. He will give you a form to fill out listing your equipment and capabilities. When you return the card the Emergency Coordinator for your county will issue you an ARES card. That's it, you're an official member of ARES! From there all you need to do is get involved and help out. Now you may ask yourself how you can help. There are many activities from SKYWARN, communications for parades, air show, etc. Let your Emergency Coordinator know just how and what you would like to do.

At this point you may say to yourself, I am too busy to get involved, I don't have time to leave my family and do things after working all day. There are many things you can do as an ARES member without even leaving your door! SKYWARN involves only taking the time to look out your back door and watch the sky, check into a net and let them know your location and if you see anything. Try being a liaison to your EC. There are many uses he can find for you without leaving your home. How about being an HF liaison for him, a traffic handler, or how about net control for the ARES net. Take the time to ask if you can be of help.

One last word on ARES! If there is no Emergency Coordinator in your county please consider joining the Michigan Section and signing up. You can contact your District Coordinator or myself to see how to get involved in the Michigan Section and get an ARES program going in your county!

RACES: How Do I Sign UP?

Here again it isn't real difficult. Go to the FEMA page on the internet. Find the course listed as IS-2. You can place an order to have the course sent to you or you can complete it on line. This is an open book test! After completing the course send the answer card to FEMA and after a short time your results will be sent back to you. They will send you a certificate stating you completed the IS-2 course. Take a copy of this certificate along with a copy of your Amateur Radio License, and a copy of your drivers license to your local Emergency Coordinator. He will turn this information over to the Emergency Manager for your county and you will be given a RACES card.

If you need more information or can't find your county listed, or want to know more about getting involved, please let me know. I would be more than happy to help you get involved in the Michigan



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Section!

Sincerely,

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(734) 482-3230

[Email to Jim](#)

Updated 5 February 2003
By Bill LeVeque, WB8Q
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District & County Emergency Coordinators

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AVAILABLE

KALKASKA

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IRON
AVAILABLE

KEWEENAW
AVAILABLE
(Houghton County helps here)

LUCE
AVAILABLE

MACKINAC
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GRR/NWS SKYWARN DISTRICT DEC

Michael Gage
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MICON-DTX SKYWARN District (Detroit Metro)

MICON-DTX DISTRICT DEC
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Who to contact

If you would like to join the ARES/RACES group in your county please contact your local Emergency Coordinator

If your county doesn't have a local coordinator please contact your District Emergency Coordinator

If you don't have a District or Local coordinator please contact your Section Emergency Coordinator, Jim Wades, WB8SIW 1708 Dover Ct. Ypsilanti, MI 48198
or email him at wb8siw@arrl.net

Updated 5 February 2003
by Bill LeVeque, WB8Q
Email: bleveque@up.net



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National Traffic System

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National Traffic System (NTS)

From The ARRL Public Service Communications Manual S2C1

The National Traffic System plan is a means for systematizing amateur traffic handling facilities by making a structure available for an integrated traffic facility designed to achieve the utmost in two principal objectives: rapid movement of traffic from origin to destination, and training amateur operators to handle written traffic and participate in directed nets. These two objectives, which sometimes conflict

with each other, are the underlying foundations of the National Traffic System.

NTS operates daily, even continuously with the advent of the advanced digital links of today.

The personnel consists of operators who participate for one or two periods a week, and some who are active daily. The National Traffic System is an organized effort to handle traffic in accordance with a plan which is easily understood, is basically sound, and which employs modern methods of network traffic handling in general acceptance today.

NTS is not intended as a deterrent or competition for the many independently-organized traffic networks. When necessitated by overload or lack of outlet for traffic, the facilities of such networks can function as alternate traffic routings where this is indicated in the best interest of efficient message relay and/or delivery.

One of the most important features of NTS is the "system concept." No NTS net is an independent entity which can conduct its activities without concern for or consideration of other NTS nets. Each net performs its function and only its function in the overall organization. To whatever extent nets fail to perform their functions or perform functions intended for other nets, to this extent is the overall system adversely affected.

Nets may sometimes find it necessary to adopt temporary expedients to ensure the movement of traffic, and this is considered improper operation only when no attempt is made to return to the normal schedule. Nevertheless, improper operation of any NTS net is the concern of all NTS nets, and every effort should be made to assist in returning any non-functioning or improperly functioning net to its normal operation.

1.1 Membership in NTS

Individual station participation in NTS is recognized by issuance of certificates, and by appointment to the field organization's traffic handling position, entitled *Official Relay Station*. Organizationally speaking, the "members" of NTS are the nets and digital nodes which participate therein. Most such nets and many of the NTS-sanctioned nodes were created and organized for NTS purposes only and operate for specific purposes to be described later. Procedures are somewhat specialized, particularly at Region, Area and TCC levels.

Frequently, ARRL Headquarters is asked how a net or digital node (BBS) may become a part of NTS. This usually isn't easy, because NTS is not a "club for nets" which any existing net may join at will. In addition, making nets a part of NTS is less a matter of official action than a "state of mind" of the net itself. In this connection, the following points deserve mention:

- Nets or packet nodes (BBS's) operating within ARRL section boundaries, or otherwise at local or section level, may become a part of NTS by performing the functions of such.
- Nets whose coverage extends beyond section boundaries but within region (roughly, call area) boundaries may become a part of NTS only by foregoing their general membership and setting up to operate as a session of the region net. Such nets would act as one of that region's net sessions and would be under the jurisdiction of the region net manager appointed by ARRL. All present NTS region nets were organized specifically at the outset for NTS region coverage.
- HF digital stations capable of storing-and-forwarding NTS messages in a system of such stations may be certified as NTS Digital Stations by NTS Officials known as Area Digital Coordinators. They are responsible for handling NTS traffic to the same high standards as their counterparts in the traditional system.
- Since operation at the area level is so specialized, it is not possible for nets whose coverage extends beyond region boundaries to be a part of NTS at any level.
- Any net or digital node which becomes a part of NTS is expected to observe the general principles of NTS procedures.
- Generally speaking, participation in NTS is best performed by individual-station participation in an already-existing NTS net, at any level.
- Lack of recognition as an NTS net does not imply that such a net is without ARRL recognition or support. Many public service nets on which information is received are included in the League's *Net Directory*, and activities are often summarized in the appropriate part of *QST*. Although NTS is the League-sponsored organization for systematic traffic handling, it is far from being the League's only interest in public service communication.

1.2 Mode

The National Traffic System is not dedicated specifically to any mode or to any type of emission, nor to the exclusion of any of them, but to the use of the best mode for whatever purpose is involved. The aim is to handle formal written traffic systematically, by whatever mode best suits the purpose at hand. Whether voice, CW, RTTY, AMTOR, packet or other digital mode is used for any specific purpose is up to the Net Manager or Managers concerned and the dictates of logic. There is only one National Traffic System, not separate systems for each mode. Modes used should be in accordance with their respective merits, personnel availabilities and liaison practicalities. Whatever mode or modes are used, we all work together in a single and thoroughly integrated National Traffic System.

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Updated 5 February 2003
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Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service

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*Special Thanks To The
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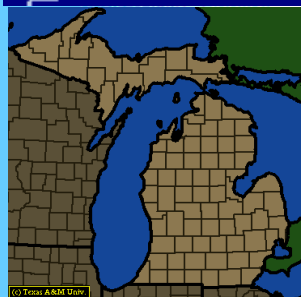
Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES)

Founded in 1952, the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) is a public service that provides a reserve communications group within government agencies in times of extraordinary need. During periods of activation, RACES personnel are called upon to perform many tasks for the government agencies they serve. Although the exact nature of each activation will be different, the common thread is communications.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is responsible for the regulation of RACES operations. Each RACES group is administrated by a local, county, or state civil defense agency responsible for disaster services. This civil defense agency is typically an emergency services or emergency management organization, sometimes within another agency such as police or fire. In some areas, RACES may be part of an agency's Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS). Some RACES groups call themselves by other names (often to avoid confusion with similar terms such as "racist" or "horse races"), such as ACS, DCS (Disaster Communications Service), or ECS (Emergency Communications Service). Groups of licensed Radio Amateurs certified by a government civil defense (or equivalent) agency are actually RACES groups (as far as the FCC is concerned), no matter what they are called, and operate under the FCC's RACES regulations.

The importance of RACES operations cannot be stressed enough. The Amateur Radio Regulations, Part 97, Subpart F, were created by the FCC to describe RACES operations in detail. Although no longer issued (but still valid), special licenses were issued in the past by the FCC to government agencies for RACES operations.

RACES provides a pool of emergency communications personnel that can be called on in time of need. RACES groups across the country prepare themselves for the inevitable day when they will be called upon. When a local, county, or state government agency activates its RACES group, that group will use its resources to meet whatever need that agency has.



Traditional RACES operations involve emergency message handling on Amateur Radio Service frequencies. These operations typically involve messages between critical locations such as hospitals, emergency services, emergency shelters, and any other locations where communication is needed. These communications are handled in any mode available, with 2 meters FM being the most prevalent.

Other tasks that RACES personnel are involved with may not involve amateur-radio communications. For example, RACES communicators may become involved in public-safety or other government communications, Emergency Operations Center (EOC) staffing, and emergency equipment repair.

Whatever need arises, trained RACES personnel are ready and prepared to help. RACES groups develop and maintain their communications ability by training throughout the year with special exercises and public-service events. When that fateful day occurs, RACES will be there to meet the challenge.

FCC Rules

§97.407 Radio amateur civil emergency service.

(a) No station may transmit in RACES unless it is an FCC-licensed primary, club, or military recreation station and it is certified by a civil defense organization as registered with that organization, or it is an FCC-licensed RACES station. No person may be the control operator of a RACES station, or may be the control operator of an amateur station transmitting in RACES unless that person holds a FCC-issued amateur operator license and is certified by a civil defense organization as enrolled in that organization.

(b) The frequency bands and segments and emissions authorized to the control operator are available to stations transmitting communications in RACES on a shared basis with the amateur service. In the event of an emergency which necessitates the invoking of the President's War Emergency Powers under the provisions of Section 706 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. §606, RACES stations and amateur stations participating in RACES may only transmit on the following frequencies:

- (1) The 1800-1825 kHz, 1975-2000 kHz, 3.50-3.55 MHz, 3.93-3.98 MHz, 3.984-4.000 MHz, 7.079-7.125 MHz, 7.245-7.255 MHz, 10.10-10.15 MHz, 14.047-14.053 MHz, 14.22-14.23 MHz, 14.331-14.350 MHz, 21.047-21.053 MHz, 21.228-21.267 MHz, 28.55-28.75 MHz, 29.237-29.273 MHz, 29.45-29.65 MHz, 50.35-50.75 MHz, 52-54 MHz, 144.50-145.71 MHz, 146-148 MHz, 2390-2450 MHz segments;
- (2) The 1.25 m, 70 cm, and 23 cm bands; and
- (3) The channels at 3.997 and 53.30 MHz may be used in emergency areas when required to make initial contact with a military unit and for communications with military stations on matters requiring coordination.

(c) A RACES station may only communicate with:

- (1) Another RACES station;
- (2) An amateur station registered with a civil defense organization;
- (3) A United States Government station authorized by the responsible agency to communicate with RACES stations;
- (4) A station in a service regulated by the FCC whenever such communication is authorized by the FCC.

(d) An amateur station registered with a civil defense organization may only communicate with:

- (1) A RACES station licensed to the civil defense organization with which the amateur station is registered;
- (2) The following stations upon authorization of the responsible civil defense official for the organization with which the amateur station is registered:
 - (i) A RACES station licensed to another civil defense organization;
 - (ii) An amateur station registered with the same or another civil defense organization;
 - (iii) A United States Government station authorized by the responsible agency to communicate with RACES stations; and

(iv) A station in a service regulated by the FCC whenever such communication is authorized by the FCC.

(e) All communications transmitted in RACES must be specifically authorized by the civil defense organization for the area served. Only civil defense communications of the following types may be transmitted:

- (1) Messages concerning impending or actual conditions jeopardizing the public safety, or affecting the national defense or security during periods of local, regional, or national civil emergencies;
- (2) Messages directly concerning the immediate safety of life of individuals, the immediate protection of property, maintenance of law and order, alleviation of human suffering and need, and the combating of armed attack or sabotage;
- (3) Messages directly concerning the accumulation and dissemination of public information or instructions to the civilian population essential to the activities of the civil defense organization or other authorized governmental or relief agencies; and
- (4) Communications for RACES training drills and tests necessary to ensure the establishment and maintenance of orderly and efficient operation of the RACES as ordered by the responsible civil defense organization served. Such drills and tests may not exceed a total time of 1 hour per week. With the approval of the chief officer for emergency planning in the applicable State, Commonwealth, District, or territory, however, such tests and drills may be conducted for a period not to exceed 72 hours no more than twice in any calendar year.

RACES News

Do YOU need some attenuation in your car?

As emergency response volunteers, we avail ourselves to public safety agencies and take personal actions to ensure that upon a RACES, ARES, or Skywarn activation, we are prepared to respond quickly.

The normal response scenario for me has been to scramble around my home gathering equipment & preparing to be deployed for an indeterminate amount of time. Depending on the situation, I might quickly pack an overnight bag, make a few phone calls while eating something, make sure I'm dressed appropriately, grab some extra radio gear, and then get into the car. In reality, it might only take five to fifteen minutes to accomplish all this before I hop into my car, but I always think I'm taking too long to get underway.

A legitimate urgency --usually magnified by my own perception-- increases again due to the feeling that I spent too much time at home preparing to leave. This resulted in the desire to reach my designated response point as quickly as possible, which in turn meant driving quickly. Listening to the initial radio net might have put me into even more of a rush. Unfortunately, not only might I be driving quickly, but at the same time, my mind is occupied by a multitude of thoughts -- what exactly is the emergency situation? Am I really ready to assist? Do I know how to get to the response point? Can I get there any faster? Should I stop now and fill the tank with gas? How long will my deployment last? As a former Deputy Emergency Coordinator & Deputy RACES Officer, I was also contemplating things like how many other ARES/RACES members would help out, how should the comms nets be operated, etc. Meanwhile of course, I'm listening to the ARES/RACES circuits, and perhaps have tuned in the public safety agencies on a scanner.

No pun intended, but my 'response mode' in itself had always been a disaster waiting to happen! I can only speak for myself, but I have every reason to believe that thousands of other volunteer emergency support personnel have had --and do have-- similar practices.

The bottom line is that no local or regional situation resulting in an ARES or RACES activation, let alone a Skywarn net activation, is worth the price of getting into an accident and injuring someone! Our ARES/RACES ID cards probably won't even save us from a traffic ticket, and attempting to use them as such could delay our response even more (as the officer tries to find out what the heck "ARES" or "RACES" is). It could also jeopardize our ARES/RACES membership. The concern over improper use is exactly why the "Michigan State Police" lettering

is so small on our RACES IDs! Sadly, some counties even make efforts to hide that wording altogether, due to embarrassing situations a few members have caused by improper use of the ID.

As ARES and RACES members, we are emergency-response personnel (when properly activated). However, at no time are our personal automobiles considered to be emergency response vehicles. If your RACES group is activated, you speed to a scene and while enroute get into a crash and kill someone, your RACES card and the circumstances behind your speeding are worthless to the police, judge, and probably jury too. Notice I called it a "crash," and not an "accident" -- if you were speeding and/or not properly concentrating on your driving when it happened, it wasn't an accident. Good luck convincing a jury (and your insurance company) otherwise.

Michigan Compiled Laws, Annotated has several sections pertaining to the legal definition of emergency vehicles, and what warning equipment (lights & sirens) they must have.

Pertinent sections include:

257.2: "Authorized emergency vehicle means vehicles of the fire department, police department, ambulances and privately owned motor vehicles of volunteer or paid firemen and volunteer ambulance drivers as are authorized by the department of state police."

257.698 (d4): "Private motor vehicles authorized by the department of state police owned by volunteer or paid fireman may be equipped with flashing, rotating, or oscillating red lights for use when responding to an authorized emergency call if the flashing, rotating or oscillating red lights are mounted on the roof section of the vehicle, either as a permanent installation or by means of suction cups or magnets and are clearly visible in a 360 degree arc from a distance of 500 feet when in use."

257.698 (e): "A person shall not sell, loan, or otherwise furnish any flashing, rotating, or oscillating blue or red light to any person except a fully constituted police officer, sheriff, deputy sheriff, volunteer or paid fireman, volunteer ambulance driver of the state, or a county or municipality within the state, or a person engaged in the business of operating an ambulance or ambulance service."

257.706 (d): "An authorized emergency vehicle may be equipped with a siren, whistle, air horn, or bell capable of emitting sound audible under normal conditions from a distance of not less than 500 feet..."

Technically speaking, many unmarked & semi-marked police vehicles don't even fit the legal definition of emergency vehicle, specifically because a 'Kojack light' thrown onto the dashboard probably cannot be readily observable in all directions from 500 feet away. Emergency vehicle operators are allowed to use their discretion regarding the use of a siren, but if they get into an accident during an emergency response in which all emergency equipment was not employed, the operator and department can be held liable for negligence.

The bottom line is that you might be an emergency responder, but by no means is your vehicle. Under an ARES, RACES, or even Skywarn activation you still must operate your motor vehicle with due regard for all laws and traffic conditions. In fact, you should pay extra attention to your driving, since if it is a major contingency, you could have to contend with real emergency vehicles as well as panicking civilian motorists on the road with you!

In a court situation, the plaintiff's attorney --and perhaps even the police-- will make every effort to characterize you as an 'ambulance-chaser' that was recklessly speeding to an incident scene. Amateur radio will be described to the jury along the lines of being similar to CB radio (the perception of which the jury has from shows like 'The Dukes of Hazard,' 'BJ & the Bear,' & 'Smokey & the Bandit'). This is in addition to the clear facts that your vehicle is NOT an authorized emergency vehicle, and that ARES/RACES leadership didn't tell you to speed, let alone have the authority to compel you to do so anyway!

Yet another wonderful thing to keep in mind is that Michigan law operates under a comparative negligence philosophy. You could have a perfect driving record, and be casually driving on a nice day. A drunken, deaf & blind criminal running from a crime scene could leap out from nowhere into the path of your car and be struck by it. If it can be proven that you were even

driving just one MPH over the speed limit, and or have been distracted by your ham radio, you're partially at fault for the injury or death, and can be held civilly and criminally liable! If you're assessed 10% blame, and the injury cost the 'victim' \$1,000,000, then you owe that alcoholic, idiotic criminal \$100,000! There are plenty of hungry attorneys out there who will make sure he or she collects, too.

What to do:

Be involved with your ARES/RACES group. Don't just be the type that gets the ID card, but then never participates in classes, meetings, or routine nets, yet has the audacity to expect to play a key role in a real activation! Every group has people like this, and leadership officials know who they are. Everyone else finds out who they are when they start tying up the radio net with dumb questions during activations. Routine participation helps prepare you for actual emergencies, and provides ample opportunity for you to ensure you to have a general understanding about contingencies & ARES/RACES response.

Minimize your initial response time by having a 'go bag' with personal & operational items ready in advance. Participating in exercises and debriefings will help you learn what items are handy to have with you.

Do not be in a huge rush to leave your home. Other than Skywarn activity (for which we often have some advance warning for), we generally aren't first-responders! Calmly preparing to leave home for your response point helps ensure you don't forget anything, lets you do get most of the thinking out of your mind, and sets you up for a calm, alert drive.

Try to know your destination & route before you start driving. If you have questions about the route, perhaps another ham staying at home can provide vectors on an alternate repeater channel.

Try to avoid providing the NCS with your ETA, or at least 'pad' your ETA with a few extra minutes. Another option which could be used by NCS and respondents is to just ask for/provide current location.

When you are driving, you are a motorist just like anyone else on the road. You have no special rights or privileges! You do have an advantage in knowing that an incident has occurred, and should be driving defensively, looking out for emergency vehicles and panicking civilians trying to leave the area, as well as the usual knuckleheads that run red lights, etc. Only on the radio, and when you reach your response point do you have any sort of special privileges as an emergency response volunteer, and they usually just consist of access to a controlled area.

Do not let emotions distract or control you, and always hold yourself personally responsible for your actions.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the above, contact your local ARES Emergency Coordinator or RACES Officer.

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Michigan State RACES Officer

Jim Wades, WB8SIW

1708 Dover Ct. Ypsilanti, MI 48198
(734) 482-3230

[Email to Jim](#)

Michigan RACES Officers By County

Michigan State Operations Plan

Who to contact

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Updated 5 February 2003

By Bill LeVeque, WB8Q

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